

Report on the Greenscape'08 Youth Organized Event for the Baltimore Office of Sustainability

Greenscape'08, sustainability outreach event organized by and for the City of Baltimore's Youth, was held at Baltimore Polytechnic Institute on October 18, 2008. The event was attended by over 150 young people, ages 3 to 24, and volunteers including public and private school students, college students, community leaders, Commission on Sustainability Working Group members and Sustainability Commissioners. The event had five main goals:

- Educate attendees about the issues related to sustainability
- Collect input on the sustainability plan
- Demonstrate that everyone's ideas count
- Get people interested in becoming environmental leaders in their communities and schools
- Provide attendees with things that they can do to improve their environment

In order to accomplish these goals, a one day event that incorporated art, music, education, and fun was planned to generate interest in the subject of sustainability and give young people a time and a place dedicated to their concerns. Activities were planned that would inspire attendees to think about their environment and then express their ideas through artwork, media production, graffiti walls, and a survey.

Greenscape'08 was held as part of the outreach plan for Baltimore's Sustainability Plan. The greater outreach plan had three major components; Work Group Discussions, Community Listening Sessions; and the Youth Component. The Work Group Discussions collected the input of professionals and community leaders in the following six areas: Energy & Air, Built Environment, Green Infrastructure, Transportation, Water, and Waste. The Community Listening Sessions consisted of attending existing community meetings in every jurisdiction in the City and facilitating a discussion of the sustainability initiative. The Youth Component was developed to specifically engage the next generation of City residents.

Background and Process

Throughout the development of the Sustainability Plan for the City of Baltimore, an emphasis was placed on community involvement and input. From the very beginning, the question was raised about how to include youth in the creation and implementation of the plan. Based on discussions within several different communities, it was decided that the best way to get young people interested in sustainability was to ask them directly how they would like to be involved. That became the guiding principle of Greenscape'08; to create an event specifically for young people, planned by young people.

An initial meeting was set up with representatives from several groups already active within the City including Youth as Resources, Art on Purpose, Safe and Sound, and Kids

on the Hill. At that meeting, the basic principles and design of the sustainability plan were presented and the young attendees were asked what they thought about including youth in the planning process. The conclusion of that meeting was that in order to engage youth in the planning process, initiatives had to demonstrate how sustainability tied into the “real world”, the initiatives had to be youth led, young people had to be asked directly what they cared about, and there needed to be partnerships between youth, concerned adults, and the City government. Some of the more specific suggestions were as follows:

- Form a committee with representatives from all different youth groups to discuss environmental issues
- Host a youth forum
- Have young people deliver message and educate their peers
- Work to build trust between youth and the City government
- Utilize online resources to connect to youth and spark discussion
- Form a youth group that expresses environmental ideas through art

Based on the feedback received at the initial youth meeting and at many of our Community Outreach meetings, the Baltimore Office of Sustainability hosted a second meeting for young leaders, aged 11 to 24, to openly discuss their thoughts and concerns about the environment and their communities. The goal of this meeting was to listen to ask for suggestions and help with getting young members of the City’s communities involved in the development of the Sustainability Plan so that it integrated their priorities.

We encouraged young leaders representing as many different neighborhoods, backgrounds, and ages as possible to attend in order to develop a well rounded plan of action for youth-led outreach efforts. At the meeting we spent a considerable amount of time doing ice breaker exercises led by Adrian Washington, Advocacy Committee Chair from the Baltimore Algebra Project, so that everyone in attendance felt comfortable expressing themselves. While a brief presentation was made about the Baltimore Sustainability Plan and the Hawaii 2050 Youth Strategy, the bulk of the discussion centered around one question; “What would be the best way to get young people in Baltimore together to discuss and offer input on the Sustainability Plan?” The resulting suggestions provided the framework within which the Office of Sustainability moved forward.

The suggestions fell into three main categories;

- In-school educational programs,
- An online youth sustainability network,
- A one day “Kick Off” event.

The in-school educational programs and the online network remain goals of the Office of Sustainability but they could not be accomplished within the existing time frame of the writing of the Sustainability Plan. The idea of hosting a one day event did however present itself as a feasible and effective way to involve youth immediately. The attendees

felt that the one day event had to have four key components in order to be successful. It had to be educational, hands on, and entertaining as well as having an information gathering component. Dozens of suggestions were offered within each of those four areas. It was also made very clear that food, healthy and available for free, would be an important component of a successful event.

At the conclusion of this meeting, a request for youth volunteers was answered by approximately a dozen young people from a wide variety of backgrounds. Both public and private schools were represented, as well as youth from different after school groups including several representatives of the Holistic life Foundation, a Baltimore City non-profit that provides human and environmental health programs that demonstrate the interconnectedness people have with the environment in which they live. These volunteers formed the core Youth Advisory Group which planned Greenscape'08. This group was charged with creating an event that accurately collected the environmental and social concerns of youth in the City as well as their priorities and potential solutions. The Youth Advisory Committee was responsible for deciding on every aspect of Greenscape'08 including the content of the event itself, the logo design, and the advertising and outreach plan. Adult participation in the event planning was limited to a supportive role only with Brett Buikema from the Office of Sustainability serving as the Project Manager and Ali Smith, one of the co-founders of the Holistic Life Foundation and a Sustainability Commissioner serving as the Co-Chair. This setup allowed the youth volunteers to freely explore their ideas and find their own voice. The result was open discussions and a sense of ownership among the volunteers.

The Organization of Greenscape'08

The Youth Advisory Group organized Greenscape'08 around the idea that they wanted attendees to learn about sustainability, offer their thoughts, and have fun. The slogan they created for the event, "Learn It, Live It, Speak It", creatively expressed all of the major goals of the day. Education was a key component and was incorporated at every level of the event.

1) Event Structure

In order to ensure that attendees participated in all of the different activities and provided input, they were issued a "passport" when they arrived which, when completed, could be turned in for a free Greenscape'08 T-shirt and a raffle ticket. To complete a passport, attendees had to participate in six interactive experiences including Office of Sustainability Working Group tables, a participant survey, several interactive games, listen to one of the musical acts, or talk to one of the participating youth and environmental groups. Volunteers at each table and area were given stickers to place on the passports upon completion of activities. Many attendees chose to collect multiple stickers in some areas, while skipping others. They were still given their free shirt because the event was about learning independently and having fun. At the end of the event, a raffle was held to further reward attendees for their participation. At the suggestion of the Youth Advisory Group, the grand prize was a bike and helmet, further

demonstrating the awareness and desire to be environmentally friendly that already exists in many young people.

While considerable attention was given to the content of Greenscape'08, an equal amount of attention was given to making the event as environmentally friendly as possible. The location was chosen based on its proximity to public transportation and available access to open green space. The majority of the food provided was locally grown and healthy, and the napkins, plates, and cups used were all compostable in an effort to make the event a Zero Waste day. The T-shirts were made from organic cotton and the raffle prizes came from local businesses.

2) Education and Feedback

Tables were set up for each of the six original Office of Sustainability Working Groups and were staffed by knowledgeable volunteers who could not only answer questions but also encourage discussion. The tables were set up with photographs taken around the city to capture attendees' attention, general questions to encourage attendees to think about the issues important to them, and graffiti walls where attendees could write their thoughts down for everyone to see. A seventh table was included for education, an issue that was raised many times during community discussions. At that table, attendees were free to talk about issues directly related to education and their school environment. In addition, attendees were asked to complete a survey to further collect input for the plan and feedback on Greenscape'08.

In addition to the previously mentioned graffiti walls and surveys, video media was utilized to capture attendees thoughts. Two of the Youth Advisory Group members, Larry Jackson and Oba Joyner, filmed the event and conducted on the spot interviews asking what sustainability meant to people and what the government could do to help improve the environment. Wide Angle Youth Media set up a video booth and conducted interviews asking what a perfect environment would look like and what people did already to improve the environment. Over two hours of film was collected for use in future presentations and for use on the website.

In order to provide a wide variety of information to attendees, several active youth organizations and environmental organizations were asked to set up tables with interactive demonstrations and information. The following groups were represented:

- The Office of Sustainability- Provided information about the concept of sustainability, the development of Baltimore's Sustainability Plan, and information about the recycling program in the City of Baltimore
- Kids on the Hill-Presented a youth produced video which articulated environmental concerns held by young city residents and discussed many of the other projects they are involved in within the City of Baltimore
- Wide Angle Youth Media- Set up a video recording booth where attendees could speak about their views on the environment and what can be done to improve it

- Maryland Department of Natural Resources-Showed attendees what recycled materials can be turned into and displayed construction materials made from sustainable materials
- U. S. Green Building Council-Provided information about green building standards specifically related to green schools
- The National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship- Provided information on entrepreneurship education programs to young people from low-income communities.
- Environmental Organizations from Friends School- Demonstrated how to make recycled notebooks using cereal boxes and paper that only had printing on one side emphasizing creative reuse of materials that would otherwise be considered garbage

3) Art

The Youth Advisory Group also felt that art was an important component to include in this event as it provided one more way for attendees to express themselves. Art on Purpose, a Baltimore based group that utilizes art to bring people together around issues and ideas, provided a hands on project in which participants placed all of the contents of their pockets that they would otherwise put in the garbage into clear gumball machine balls and then drew pictures of what a better environment would look like. The activity served to get people thinking about what they put in the trash and where it goes when they throw it out. Also on display was a collection of photographs from Jessica Kemp, a MICA Graduate Student, and artist Katie Wahlberg displayed information on her sustainable art sculpture called Trash Ball. Trash Ball is part of the organization TRAsh Collective, a group of artists based in Knoxville, Tennessee which produce public art work that is designed to inspire people to live more sustainable lives.

4) Entertainment and Games

The entertainment component of Greenscape'08 was utilized not only to attract people to the event but also to add to the diversity of the event. The Youth Advisory Group suggested having several different types of musical acts throughout the day as well as interactive games that stressed teambuilding. Jason Toraldo, the Urban Education Coordinator from the Irvine Nature Center, worked with the Youth Advisory Group to select games that were not only fun, but also demonstrated that you did not need to have "stuff" to have a good time. Ali Smith coordinated three musical acts; 86 the Effort, For the People Entertainment, and Shodekeh with Max Beats. The music and the games created a relaxed, casual atmosphere that both young people and adults responded to.

5) Advertising and Promotion

In order to reach out to young people across the City, advertising and promotion was one of the primary focuses of the Youth Advisory Group. Two flyers were developed by Youth Advisory Members, one stressing the entertainment and one stressing the reasons we were hosting Greenscape'08. All of the graphics and verbiage used were created and agreed upon by the volunteers so that it accurately portrayed their thoughts and ideas. The existing Office of Sustainability network was initially utilized to distribute the flyers.

In addition, the Mayors Office distributed them to the Office of Neighborhoods mailing list and to all Baltimore City Public Schools, as well as including the event on the Mayor's and the City Council President's weekly online newsletter which is distributed to all city employees as well as many neighborhood associations. The Sustainability Commissioners were asked to distribute them to their networks, as were all of the Working Group Members. The Youth Advisory Group also distributed them to the networks they belonged to and several college groups posted them online and distributed flyers on campus. In an effort to capitalize on the prolific use of online networking, a Facebook event page was set up as well and within 24 hours of posting the event, over 400 people had been forwarded the invitation. While not all of those who responded ended up attending, the site did serve to effectively spread the message about the Office of Sustainability and the Plan. In addition Kelley Ray Consulting was contracted to arrange additional media coverage.

Results and Recommendations - Greenscape'08

Over 150 youth and volunteers attended Greenscape'08 on October 18, 2008 at Baltimore Polytechnic Institute including public and private school students, college students, community leaders, Commission on Sustainability Working Group members and Commissioners.

Survey Results

A total of 49 surveys were completed and each working group table generated a large amount of feedback on the graffiti walls. The youngest survey respondent was 3 years old, the oldest was 76, but the majority were between the ages of 13 and 17. Thirty seven percent of the respondents were male and sixty three percent were female. While only 37 percent were familiar with the concept of sustainability prior to the event, 94 percent felt that the event either very helpful or somewhat helpful in building their understanding of sustainability. When asked how they would rank sustainability as a goal for the City of Baltimore 22 percent responded Top, 33 percent responded High, and 35 percent responded Medium. The remainder of the survey asked respondents to rank various City services and issues based on their opinion of importance. The results of that ranking combined with the comments on the graffiti walls led to six major themes. They are as follows:

- There is a need for affordable, safe, reliable public transportation
- There should be an increase in neighborhood cleanups and community service projects in order to increase the sense of stewardship and responsibility that each person has for their piece of the environment
- There is a direct connection between trash on the streets, vacant homes and crime which creates an unhealthy and dangerous environment to live in
- There has to be an improvement in the environment at schools and environmental educational programs need to be provided
- There must be an increase in both information about waste reduction and access to recycling programs

- There has to be immediate attention paid to reducing air pollution and the prevention of Global Warming

While not all that different from the concerns of the adult population, the concerns reflected by youth demonstrated an awareness of many of the challenges that the City faces in trying to become more sustainable and they recognized that they can be directly involved in efforts to improve the environment. There was a very clear recognition that each person has to be responsible for the impact their actions have on the planet and there was a recognition that many people need to learn new behavior patterns.

Based on written input and conversations with both the Youth Advisory Group and Greenscape'08 attendees, the greatest thing that young people want is increased opportunity to have their voice heard. Young people recognize that they are the ones who will be the leaders in the future and they want a say now in what that future looks like. They are willing to accept responsibility for their actions and they want to be empowered to teach others through youth ambassador programs and peer to peer groups. The concept of "Learn It, Live It, Speak It" resonated with both young people and volunteers. Young people want to be informed, they want to improve their quality of life, and they want to share with others what they know.

Learn It

Within the "Learn It" concept, there is a call for immediate improvements in school environments. One of the suggestions that was often repeated was the creation of a "Green Team" in each school that would work to implement energy and water conservation programs, promote recycling, and initiate environmental education programs. These teams could form a City wide network and foster relationships between schools, possibly competitions, or sister schools.

Live It

Within the "Live It" concept there is a call for each individual to develop environmentally friendly habits and then to lead by example within their neighborhoods. Young people were eager to learn about ways that they could improve their environment through community service projects and after school groups that provide opportunities to learn and give back. They have the enthusiasm required to create and implement projects and want the support of community and government leaders.

Speak It

Within the "Speak It" concept there is a desire to share information with other young people, especially those not normally interested in environmental issues. Young people want to have more events like Greenscape'08 that are geared towards them and their interests. They want an online community where they can share information and learn about what is going on in the City and how they can stay involved. They are overwhelmingly concerned with being taken seriously and they recognize that change can be accomplished through teamwork and unity both with other young people and with supportive adults.

In conclusion, the youth outreach efforts of the Office of Sustainability confirmed that young people are aware of the environmental and sustainability issues facing the City of Baltimore. Young people view the City as in need of immediate improvement and they recognize their role and responsibility in creating improvements. While the suggestions in this report summarize the main concerns, this is by no means an exhaustive report.

The recommendations in this report reflect the concerns not only of young people but also of the Office of Sustainability. The Office of Sustainability will strive to continue to include youth in the development of the Sustainability Plan and the creation of sustainable policies stemming from the finalized Plan. The success of Greenscape'08 demonstrates that youth can accomplish their goals when they are given encouragement and support. It is hoped that the young people involved will continue to be leaders within their schools and communities.

Next Steps

The Youth Advisory Group will continue to meet to discuss involvement in various other environmental and sustainability projects around the City. Short term goals include participation in Baltimore Green Week in the spring of 2009 and applying for a President's Environmental Youth Award. The Youth Advisory Group would also like to move quickly to organize a presentation that can be distributed to the schools, perhaps presented by Youth Advisory Group Members or by Youth Ambassadors that would be trained in a similar manner to the Adult Ambassadors that were utilized during the Community Listening Sessions. Additional research into the setting up both in school educational programs and an online network, both mentioned at the initial youth meeting, needs to be conducted as both things remain a priority.